



ART GALLERY OF REGINA

RISA HOROWITZ
INFRONT OF A MIDBEFORE
(THE COMBINATION
AND ASSEMBLY OF ALL
THESE POSSIBILITIES)

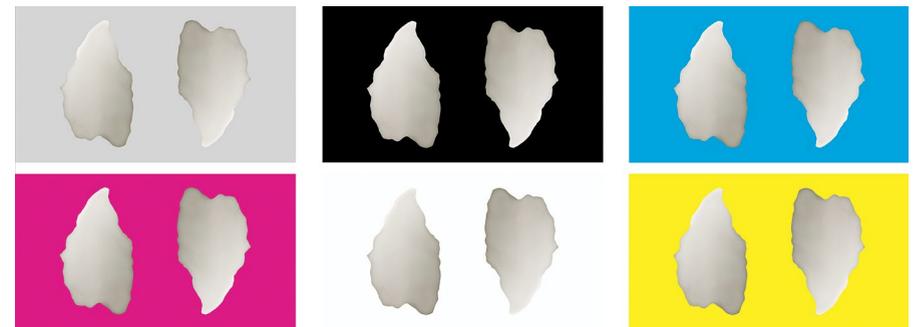


Chromogenic photographs, 72 x 26"

I Woke to a Bright Blue Glacier
 (Smeerenburgreen-Blubber Town Glacier/Bjørnfjorden,
 79°37'0" N, 011°29'3"E, June 14, 2017)

They Went on Forever
 (Recherchebreen-Research Glacier,
 77°29'6" N, 014°39'3"E, June 22, 2017)

I Caused a Landslide
 (Vårsolbukta-Little Auk Bight,
 77°45'3" N, 014°20'2"E, June 21, 2017)



Chromogenic photographs, 72 x 26"

There Were So Many
 (Smeerenburgreen-Blubber Town Glacier/Bjørnfjorden,
 79°37'0" N, 011°29'3"E, June 14, 2017)

A False Sense of Isolation
 (Ytre Norskøya-Outer Norway Island,
 79°51'44" N, 011°26'8"E, June 17, 2017)

I Wanted to Console the Ice
 (Northern Fjortende Julibukta-14th of July Glacier,
 79°07'2" N, 011°51'1"E, June 13, 2017)

Infrontofamidbefore (the combination and assembly of all these possibilities)

There is a gap between how we want the world to be and how it is. Close your eyes and say: *the Arctic*. Your mind conjures a blinding white land of vast icescapes and frigid water, populated with unfettered wind and polar bears. The isolation of the Arctic has been touched only by the most adventurous of our species and made legend through daring tales of exploration.

But wait. Those pristine glaciers are melting. While not yet endangered, the polar bear's official conservation status is "vulnerable". Their territory dwindles year after year as we consume everything plastic, refuel our cars, and rush to maintain the status quo. The top of the world is slowly dying, as much an indicator as the way that the leaves of an unhealthy houseplant fade first at the tip. Inevitably, the disjunct of these two realities - the one we imagine and the one that is real - becomes impossible to turn away from.

Robert Smithson (most famous for his germinal work of land art, *Spiral Jetty*) refers to "abstract geology" which he describes as "visible and invisible forms of the same reality, one that most of us will never experience." Human thought processes and environmental evolutions become superimposed in Smithson's concept. He writes, "One's mind and the earth are in a constant state of erosion, mental rivers wear away abstract banks, brain waves undermine cliffs of thought, ideas decompose into stones of unknowing. . . . The entire body is pulled into the cerebral sediment, where particles and fragments make themselves known as solid consciousness."¹ Our internal and external worlds cannot be divided; what is seen and unseen collide to make the fullest picture of reality. Aboard a tall ship in the Arctic, Risa Horowitz grappled with the rifts between the visible and invisible to situate herself in an unfamiliar and indifferent land. The narrative titles of her photographs make us participants of an adventure though we did not embark upon one. The words offer a trail of crumbs, inviting us to situate ourselves in the Arctic too.

And what appears there? *I Woke to a Bright Blue Glacier, 2017* is a chromogenic photograph that illuminates what it must be like to begin the day in a sea of ice and snow. The glassy stillness of the water leads to the sapphire edges of the Smeerenburgreen-Blubber Town Glacier/Bjørnfjorden. We see the glimmer of light and land in the hazy distance. To wake to this vista signals transcendence of normality, even as the body must continue the mundane rituals of being alive. How is it possible that this intensity of colour, this range of texture exists in a single view? The mind cannot fully compute the surreal scene. Suddenly, we recognize the expansiveness of feeling that creeps in when we face the sublime. The landscape is alive in a way that opens so much possibility. In *All These Boundaries, 2017* the rock, snow, and sky are delineated by edges that aren't boundaries; borders that aren't divisions. Each of the forms are parts of a whole, indiscernibly entangled and shifting as one. Is that a bit of sky at the top of the frame or snow capping another tower of rock? As befuddling as an image from Mars, the land dissolves and folds in on itself. The visible cannot be defined; the invisible is somehow possible to behold.

There is something incongruous about inhabiting a human body in the Arctic, against the sheer scale of ice, rock, sea, and sky. The pale forms of *They Went on Forever, 2017* are slippery at the edges and elusive to the eye, just as our notion of self can be. What compass can locate our presence amongst the land, sea, and indeterminate space? These images layer the expansive physicality of the Arctic landscape over the endless range of possibility contained within our finite lives.

It would be easy to dissolve into the magnificence and wonder of these images, to become enraptured with beauty. But look closely, where edges meet. What else is there? Things that are unseen but felt. Mounds of whale bones from hunts of centuries past, bleached plastics

washed ashore, boatloads of ecotourists poised around the far point of an iceberg. You're looking at a ghost. The glaciers in these photos are disappearing and we are all complicit in their fate.

A False Sense of Isolation, 2017 presents a single photo of a rock, arranged in a compilation reminiscent of an origami instruction manual. The shapes are both organic and geometric, twisted and manipulated to create new ground. Horowitz described how, throughout the trip, the captain attempted to orient the ship so that other vessels (and there were many) remained out of sight. The artists were faced with the problematic nature of their presence in the Arctic, with the consequence of the jet fuel they'd burned to reach the ship's departure point. The compilation's artifice strives to make things beautiful, or at least different.

Likewise, *I Wanted to Console the Ice, 2017* gives a nod to the burden of responsibility and the ways that it finds us peripherally. Horowitz spent a long while with the piece of ice: "I touched it, I sat with it, I photographed it from many angles." She was compelled to comfort her "beached iceberg"². In the studio, she further isolated the image of the ice, removed it from its photographic context, manipulated and duplicated it, then lay the copies on individual colour fields. The little lost ice floe appears alone and shrinking, a sense that Horowitz exaggerates through her analytical process.

The sense of human complicity is addressed most directly in *I Caused a Landslide, 2017*. As in all delicate ecologies, the artists were taught to avoid stepping in other's footsteps to lessen the impact on the moss and lichen of the tundra meadows. But even the gentlest human presence has consequence. Horowitz spent an afternoon throwing small stones at a cliff face and documented the evolving impact of her action. The tender, damp soil beneath the crust of dried earth was exposed. The landslide Horowitz generated is tiny, seemingly inconsequential, but who knows what sort of wound that subtle erosion will eventually cause. The world bears scars that will demand reckoning. No landscape expresses both the fragility of our world and the vast consequence poised to befall us as poignantly as the Arctic. The "same reality" that Horowitz encountered in the Arctic is the constantly shifting place where we must all situate ourselves now. It is a place "where remote future meets remote past"³, a floating, rocking world; strangely tedious in its utterly vast and breathtaking scope.

During our studio visit, Horowitz repeatedly stated, "I set out to photograph the sun. The sun didn't shine."⁴ What she wanted, imagined and hoped for, did not appear. The fiery orb remained tethered to our earthly days but obscured by cloud and fog, it couldn't be photographed. The sun would have been a marker, a way for Horowitz to recognize herself and her art practice in a strange landscape. But "the map is not the territory"⁵; our expectations often go unmet. Arguably our lives are a quest to place ourselves in a mostly incomprehensible world. Maybe, if we remain open to the endless possibilities, we find ourselves in ways we couldn't imagine.

Terri Fidelak

1 Robert Smithson, *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 134.

2 Risa Horowitz in conversation with the author, July 2017.

3 Robert Smithson, *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 142.

4 Risa Horowitz, in conversation with the author, July 2017.

5 Alfred Korzybski, *Science and Sanity* (1933), 58.

**Risa Horowitz: Infrontofamidbefore
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